

Friday, 22 May 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ / OLPH Family,

Over the past several weeks we have endured a great period of trial in our world, the District and our parish community. As we have learned a new way of life and coped with the Covid-19 pandemic. We have also learned patience and resilience. In conjunction with the adjustments, isolation and financial stress of the situation, you have persevered with the Lords' help.

For the Faithful family of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, these hardships have been compounded with the inability to worship together or receive Holy Eucharist or even come to Church to pray. As this time has been difficult, I believe in following these necessary rules to safeguard the health of each and everyone of you is important. The stay-at-home order, and quarantine, so far has proven to be most beneficial to arresting the spread of the Corona Virus. At the same time many of you long for the participation in the Sacramental Life of the Church.

Some of you have been made aware that the Archdiocese has developed a first-phase plan for the re-opening of Churches, with strict restrictions and guidelines for the Celebration of Mass. As these guidelines are in anticipation of offering public Mass as early as Monday, the 25th of May. This plan is a general plan and must be adapted to local jurisdiction and parish facilities. Since massive efforts will have to be made to provide a safe and sterile environment many parishes will need a longer period of time to develop protocols to execute the guidelines. Prudent and responsible decisions have to be made in cooperation with the guidelines to take precautions to protect you, myself and the common good.

The seriousness of this pandemic is not yet over, and especially as it affects our African American community. Therefore, the safety and protection of the faithful in this first-phase of opening Churches is a main concern. While corporal Mass and liturgies is a desire of us all, we still have to be smart and stay healthy. The guidelines are very restrictive and depend heavily on the cooperation of everyone. We do not want to rush into satisfying government and economic expectations at the risk of sickness and death of God's children.

The archbishop has not mandated this re-opening of churches and has not obligated or compelled the priests and pastors to offer public Mass at this time. It is at the discretion of the Pastor to when he and his parishioners may resume, within the protocols of the guidelines.

I as your pastor have decided NOT to resume public mass at this time at OLPH. We will continue to livestream the masses for your spiritual participation. As the particular guidelines of a person 65 and over age restriction is still in place, as well as those with pre-existing health conditions, are encouraged to remain home they fit in the "at-risk" category. Many liturgical practices as well are either omitted or amended in the re-opening phase. I will keep you updated by livestream, bulletin and webpage announcement as local plans for re-opening OLPH are developed.

Recorded cases of churches opening too soon as recent as last week, have already had to close their doors due to positive Covid-19 testing among attending parishioner's and priest. We at OLPH, want to take our time and make our gathering at Mass a celebration of thanksgiving not a cautious, tense and reluctant worship experience in the House of the Lord.

I ask that you please be patient as we develop a re-opening plan and date as to when we can assure the maximum health safety of those attending Sacramental Celebrations at Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

As we continue to devote ourselves in one accord through prayers and virtual celebration of Holy Eucharist, we continue to be Church. Faithfully acknowledging that Church is not in an architectural structure, but the heart and souls of this faithful community of believers.

During this time please remember that the faithful will continued to be dispensed from the obligation to attend Mass on Sunday and Holy Days of Obligation. You are to continue to make a Spiritual Communion, as you participate in the live-streamed Masses at OLPH, and elsewhere.

As we await the coming of the Holy Spirit, let us continue to serve the spiritual needs of our brothers and sisters as we pray to the Blessed Mother Mary, who by her womb entrusted her son, our Risen Lord Jesus to be with us and bring us Peace in this time of need and always.

May the Resurrected Jesus be with you,
my Love and Prayers

Very Rev. Michael L. Thompson, SSJ
Pastor